

City of Santa Barbara Fire Department

After the Fire Information

Introduction

This information was developed as a resource tool to give you information you will need to assist you in reducing your losses after the fire is out. In the event you cannot find the help you need, please phone 805-965-5254 and we will assist you in locating the appropriate individual or agency that can help.

Insured/Not Insured Property

If you are insured:

The first thing to do after a fire is to contact your insurance company, or agent, as soon as possible. If you are renting or leasing the property, you must also contact the owner. Your insurance adjuster may be able to assist you in making immediate repairs or help in securing your home. If you are unable to contact your agent and need professional assistance in boarding up your home, you may contact a general contractor or a fire damage restoration firm (refer to your yellow pages, under Contractors-General or Fire & Water Damage Restoration.)

Even if you are insured, the American Red Cross can assist you, 805-687-1331.

If you are not insured:

If your property is not insured or if your insurance will not cover all your losses, contact your family lawyer or the Internal Revenue Service for directions. You may be eligible for casualty loss. Check Publication 547, Tax Information on Disasters, Casualty Losses and Thefts, available from your local Internal Revenue Service office.

If you are not insured and need assistance, the American Red Cross is available to assist families who have been displaced from their homes through any type of disaster. They are available around the clock every day of the year with food, clothing and housing 805-687-1331.

Whether you're insured or not, you may want to check with the Santa Barbara County Assessor's office to see if your property tax can be reduced during the repair period.

Assessment of fire damage

The Fire Department will notify the Building & Safety Division if your home has sustained damage as a result of fire. A Building Inspector will conduct an inspection of your home to assess the extent of the fire damage and to determine what permits are required to repair it. Contact the Community Development Department for questions regarding repair and reconstruction 805-564-5485

Utilities

Often the Fire Department must have the utility services shut off or disconnected as a safety precaution and also to prevent further damage to the structure and contents.

Southern California Edison	1-800-611-1911
Southern California Gas Company	1-800-427-2200
Cox Cable	805-683-6651

If you move

If you move, notify the Post Office, banks, water department, credit card companies, magazine/newspapers, etc. of your new address.

Vehicle Fires

If insured

Contact your insurance agent who can explain coverage and will assist you with your claim.

If your vehicle is damaged in a structure fire, contact both your home insurance and vehicle insurance agents.

If vehicle is a total loss (beyond repair), it may have some value to a salvage yard. A list of vehicle salvage companies can be obtained in the yellow pages of your phone directory, under Automobile Wrecking.

Santa Barbara City Fire Department Procedures

You might ask why we break windows and doors or put holes in your roof. Fire produces temperatures well over 1200°F, along with smoke and hot gases. At times it is necessary to eliminate heat, smoke and hot gases before firefighters can enter to extinguish the fire. The ventilation must be done quickly to help reduce fire spread and smoke damage. Often walls must be forcibly opened to check for "hidden" fires, allowing complete fire extinguishment. After the fire is out, the damage may appear unnecessary; however, without the use of these fire fighting techniques, complete fire suppression would be extremely difficult.

Occasionally, fire crews will have to force entry into the vehicle to check for fire extension and to extinguish the fire. To insure that the fire is completely extinguished, it may be necessary for fire crews to:

1. Cut and/or disconnect battery cables to prevent electrical shorting of wires where insulation of wiring has been damaged.
2. Perform a complete removal of padding from seats, especially where cotton padding is used.
3. Force entry into the passenger compartment, engine compartment, and trunk of vehicle in order to extinguish fire, check for fire extension, and gain access to battery cables.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Pets

Smoke can damage the lungs of a dog or cat in minutes, and sparks can cause painful burns which may stay hidden under your pet's fur. As soon as possible, take your pet to a veterinarian. If your pet is lost in the confusion, call the Santa Barbara Humane Society or Santa Barbara City Animal Control office 805-681-4332

Counseling Support

After a fire you may experience anxious feelings, depression, difficulty concentrating, sadness, anger, fatigue, irrational (unfounded) fears and nightmares. These are common responses to a traumatic event. If you or your family members need support, call the American Red Cross 805-687-1331 or check your yellow pages, under Counselors. Some employers and/or health insurance carriers provide coverage for counseling services.

What about cash or negotiables?

If burned, handle with extreme care and as little as possible, attempt to encase each crisp sheet in a plastic wrap in order to salvage as much as possible. Take everything to your local bank for advice regarding replacement.

What about perishables?

Any food, beverages and/or medicines exposed to heat or smoke should not be consumed. Medicines, especially, can change strength by exposure to heat. Please check with your doctor first before taking these medicines. If food was in tightly closed or sealed containers, or in airtight refrigerators or freezers, they may be salvageable. It is cheaper to replace the material than to jeopardize your health by taking a chance. If in doubt, throw it out!

What about odors?

Sometimes there is a residual smoke odor from a small fire that is annoying and lingering. Short of a good cleaning of everything in the house, you can place small saucers of household vanilla, wine, vinegar, or activated charcoal about your home to help absorb these odors. *Remember that the smoke odor is also inside the heating and cooling duct work and you get a fresh blast of it every time your air system is turned on.*

If insured, consult your insurance company for assistance. If the odor does not go away in about a week, you may, and probably should, call a janitorial supply or cleaning service specializing in restoration of fire damaged property (refer to your yellow pages, under Fire & Water Damage Restoration). They have the equipment to scrub out the duct work and deodorize everything in the house.

General Cleaning / Salvage Hints

If insured, contact your insurance company. If not, here are some hints you might want to consider:

1. VACUUM - all surfaces.
2. AIR CONDITIONER / HEATER FILTERS - Change all.
3. Seal off the room in which you are working - seal with plastic to keep soot from moving from one location to another. Try to keep windows closed.
4. PAINTED WALLS - to remove soot and smoke from walls, mix together 4 to 6 tablespoons tri-sodium phosphate (can be purchased in paint stores) and 1 gallon of water. Suggest you use rubber gloves and goggles while working with this solution.

Warning - Keep mixture away from children and pets

Wash one small area at a time, working from the floor up. Do ceilings last. Rinse thoroughly. Do not repaint until completely dry. It is advisable to use a smoke sealer (available in paint stores) before painting.

WALLPAPERED WALLS - usually wallpaper cannot be restored. Check with your wallpaper dealer.

5. FURNITURE - do not use chemicals on furniture. A very inexpensive product called FLAX SOAP (readily available in hardware and paint stores) is a most efficient product to use on wood, including kitchen cabinets. Do not dry furniture in the sun, because the wood will warp and twist out of shape.

6. FLOORS - use FLAX SOAP on wood and linoleum floors. It will take 4 or 5 applications. Then strip and re-wax.

7. CARPETING - Steam clean, shampoo and repeat steam cleaning.

8. MATTRESSES - Reconditioning an inner-spring mattress at home is very difficult, if not impossible. Your mattress can probably be renovated by a company which builds or repairs mattresses. If you must use your mattress temporarily, put it out into the sun to dry, then cover it with plastic sheeting. It is almost impossible to get smoke out of pillows. Feathers and foam retain odors.

9. LOCKS AND HINGES - Locks (especially iron locks) should be taken apart, wiped with kerosene and oiled. If locks cannot be removed, squirt machine oil through a bolt opening or keyhole and work the knob to distribute the oil. Hinges should also be thoroughly cleaned and oiled.

10. MILDEW - to remove mildew, wash stain with soap and water. Rinse well and dry. If stain remains, use lemon juice and salt, or a solution of household chlorine bleach and warm water.

11. CLOTHES - to remove smoke odor or soot from clothes which can be bleached, add 1/2 cup of ammonia to two gallons of water, then rinse in vinegar (use rubber gloves). Should you have any questions about the cleaning or preparation of clothing, it is wise to contact a cleaning service. Take wool, silk or rayon garments to the dry cleaners as soon as possible.

Warning - Do NOT mix ammonia with bleach

12. ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES - Do not run wet appliances until you have had a service person check them.

13. COOKING UTENSILS - Your pots, pans, flatware, etc. should be washed with soapy water, rinsed and then polished with a fine-powdered cleaner. You can polish copper and brass with special polish, salt sprinkled on a piece of lemon, or salt sprinkled on a cloth saturated in vinegar.

Warning - Do NOT use gasoline for cleaning